

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 827

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL KARACHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: UDF GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING: OPPOSITION

UNCERTAINTY CONTINUES

1. SUMMARY: LOCAL PRESS HAD REPORTED THAT OPPOSITION UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT (UDF) HELD GENERAL MEETING IN LAHORE MAY 8-9. UDF'S PLENARY BODY, ELECTED OFFICERS (PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE HEAD PIR OF PAGARO WAS RETURNED AS PRESIDENT), SELECTED A JOINT PARLIAMENTARY BOARD AND "APPROVED" A DRAFT JOINT ELECTION MANIFESTO. A SERIES OF RESOLUTIONS WAS PASSED CONDEMNING VARIOUS GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN (GOP) POLICIES, AND ACTIONS VIS-A-VIS OPPOSITION. AS AGAINST THESE MODEST ACHIEVEMENTS, NO DECISION WAS REACHED ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN GENERAL ELECTIONS AND SHARP CLEAVAGES WERE REVEALED OVER PROPOSED OFFER OF USF LEADERSHIP TO TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL (TIP) CHIEF ASGHAR KHAN. ISSUE OF INCLUDING NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP), NAP'S SUCCESSOR, IN FRONT APPARENTLY DID NOT ARISE. POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT VARIOUS FRONT PARTIES MAY BREAK OFF TO FORM SEPARATE ELECTORAL ALLIANCES. POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE CONTINUE TO BE SCEPTICAL ABOUT ABILITY OF UDF TO UNIFY OPPOSITION AND SUCCESSFULLY CONFRONT RULING PAKISTAN PEGNLES PARTY (PPP). FOR BHUTTO,

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UDF SEEMS APPARENTLY REMAINS LITTLE MORE THAN AN OBJECT

OF RIDICULE. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING PRESS REPORTS, GENERAL COUNCIL OF OPPOSITION UDF, FRONT'S PLENARY BODY, MET IN LAHORE MAY 8-9 AND RE-ELECTED PIR SAHIB OF PAGARO AS PRESIDENT. ALSO RETURNED WERE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MAULANA MUFTI MAHMOOD, MNA, JAMIAT-UL-ULAMA-E-ISLAM (JUI) AND GENERALY SECRETARY PROFESSOR GHAFUOR AHMAD, MNA, JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI (JI). IN ADDITION, COUNCIL ELECTED FOUR VICE PRESIDENTS AND FIVE JOINT SECRETARIES BESIDES CHAUDHRY ZAHUR ELAHI, MNA, PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE (PML) AS CHAIRMAN OF FINANCE COMMITTEE. (ZAHUR ELAHI, UNDER DETENTION IN KARACHI, WAS ELECTED IN ABSENTIA.) IT WAS REPORTED THAT CENTRAL ACTION COMMITTEE (CAC) OF UDF -- FRONT'S MAIN EXECUTIVE BODY -- WILL CONSIST AS IN PAST OF FRONT OFFICE BEARERS AND HEADS OF COMPONENT PARTIES. PRESENT AT LAHORE MEETING WERE FOLLOWING LEADERS OF UDF MEMBER GROUPS: PIR OF PAGARO (PML); MAULANA MUFTI MAHMOOD (JUI); MIAN TUFAIL MOHAMMED (JI); NAWABZADA NASRULLAH KHAN, PAKISTAN JAMHOORI PARTY (PJP) AND HAJI SARFARAZ KHAN, KHAKSAR TEHRIK. KHAWAJA MOHAMMED ALI KANWAL REPRESENTED JAMMU AND KASHMIR MUSLIM CONFERENCE, A NON-FRONT PARTY OPPOSED TO PPP GOVERNMENT IN AZAD KASHMIR.

3. ADDRESSING A PRESS CONFERENCE AT CONCLUSION OF MEETING MAY 9, GENERAL SECRETARY PROFESSOR GHAFUOR AHMAD REPORTEDLY SAID A JOINT MANIFESTO HAD BEEN APPROVED BY ALL SIX UDF MEMBER PARTIES, BUT QUALIFIED THIS BY ADDING THAT A SIXA MEMBER COMMITTEE WITH MALIK MOHAMMAD QASIM (PML GENERAL SECRETARY, PUNJAB) AS ITS CONVENER HAD BEEN CONSTITUED TO "FINALIZE" MANIFESTO FOR LATER APPROVAL BY CAC. HE STATED THAT GENERAL COUNCIL HAD CONSTITUTED A PARLIAMENTARY BOARD (TO SELECT FRONT CANDIDATES) FOR NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS WITH ALL UDF PARTY LEADERS AS ITS MEMBERS (FRONT PRESIDENT AND GENERAL SECRETARY SERVE EX-OFFICIO).

4. AHMAD SAID THAT FREE AND FAIR GENERAL ELECTIONS WERE ONLY MEANS BY WHICH GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE CHANGED. HE REPORTEDLY STATE, HOWEVER, THAT PRESENT REGIME SHOULD ENSURE IN PRACTICE THAT IT IS COMMITTED TO SAME PRINCIPLE. REPLYING TO A QUESTION REGARDING EARLIER UDF DEMAND FOR FORMATION OF A NATIONAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOVERNMENT BEFORE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS, HE SAID "DEMAND HAD BEEN MADE BECAUSE OF UNUSUAL CONDITIONS CREATED IN COUNTRY."

5. AHMAD TOLD PRESSMEN THAT UDF BELIEVED IN UNITY OF OPPOSITION AND WOULD CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TO PERSUADE OTHER PARTIES TO JOIN IN NATIONAL STRUGGLE. HE SAID TALKS IN THIS REGARD HAD BEEN HELD AMONG PML, JUP (A FORMER FRONT MEMBER) AND TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL (TIP WITH UDF SANCTION.

HOWEVER, HE DENIED REPORTS THAT ONE OF UDF CONSTITUENT PARTIES (PML) WAS JOINING HANDS WITH JUP AND TIP.

6. AHMAD REPORTEDLY STATED THAT GENERAL COUNCIL VIEWED WITH GREAT CONCERN PRESENT TREND IN LAW-MAKING, ASSERTING THAT UNDER EMERGENCY STILL IN FORCE, BASIC RIGHTS REMAIN SUSPENDED. HE CRITICIZED GOP POLICY TOWARD AZAD KASHMIR AND DEMANDED THAT A POPULAR GOVERNMENT BE ELECTED THERE. HE HIT PPP REGIME FOR ACTIONS TAKEN AGAINST OPPOSITION PARTIES, CITING RECENT ARRESTS OF CHAUDHRY ZAHUR ELAHI, MNA (PML) AND SENATOR HANEEF RAMAY (PML), ABDUCTION LAST OCTOBER OF MPAS (PPP) MIAN IFTIKAR AHMAD TARI AND CHAUDHRY MOHAMMED IRSHAD (CLOSE FRIENDS OF PML SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT BHULAM MUSTAFA HAR), ASADULLAH MENGAL INCIDENT (MENGAL, SON OF FORMER BALUCHISTAN CHIEF MINISTER ATAULLAH MENGAL (NAP) NOT UNDER TRIAL IN HYDERABAD WITH WALI KHAN AND OTHER NAP LEADERS, WAS ALLEGEDLY ABDUCTED BY GOVERNMENT-INSPIRED ELEMENTS EARLIER THIS YEAR IN KARACHI AND RECENT BURGLARY OF NAWABZADA NUSRULLAH KHAN'S (PRESIDENT, PJP) HOUSE. THESE FACTS, HE SAID, STAND BEFORE NATION. ACCORDING PRESS, GENERAL COUNCIL PASSED A SERIES OF RESOLUTIONS CONDEMNING GOVERNMENT FOR THESE AND OTHER ACTIONS.

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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7. COMMENT: UDF GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING HAS LEFT OPPOSITION IN CONTINUING STATE OF UNCERTAINTY. NO

DECISION ON KEY ISSUE OF PARTICIPATING IN GENERAL ELECTIONS WAS REACHED AND NO JOINT MANIFESTO CLEARLY APPROVED. FEW MODEST GAINS ACHIEVED -- SELECTION OF JOINT PARLIAMENTARY BOARD, ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND SATISFACTION OF UNLEASHING ANOTHER SERIES OF RESOLUTIONS AGAINST GOP -- AT BEST WILL ENABLE FRONT TO HOBBLE ALONG IN PRESENT BROKEN-DOWN CONDITION. PRO-GOVERNMENT PAKISTAN TIMES ACCURATELY DESCRIBED UDF AS A "HOUSE DIVIDED" IN A MAY 11 EDITORIAL.

8. CLEAVAGES CAME INTO SHARP FOCUS OVER ISSUE OF OFFERING FRONT LEADERSHIP TO TIP CHIEF ASGHAR KHAN. DESPITE STRONG SUPPORT FROM KHAR FACTION WITHIN PML, TIP BID WAS ULTIMATELY REJECTED. JI AND PJP LEADERS, OLD ENEMIES OF ASGHAR KHAN, WERE AMONG KEY ELEMENTS THAT OPPOSED HIM. (THIS MAY SPUR FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS AMONG PML, TIP AND JUP TO FORM AN ALLIANCE OF THEIR OWN.) NOTABLE AT MEETING WAS APPARENT LACK OF DISCUSSION ABOUT INCLUDING SHER BAZ KHAN MAZARI'S NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) IN FRONT. CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS IN PML, PJP AND JI, WHO HAVE NO INTEREST IN "LEGITIMIZING" NAP'S SUCCESSOR PARTY IN PRO-ISLAM, NATIONALIST PUNJAB, PROBABLY SQUELCHED SUBJECT. AS A RESULT, FOR NAP ALLY
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JUI, ALREADY CLOSE TO NDP, WILL HAVE TO BREAK WITH FRONT IF IT INTENDS TO PURSUE NEGOTIATIONS WITH NDP ABOUT ADOPTING A JOINT ELECTION PLATFORM IN BALUCHISTAN AND NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE.

9. POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE REAMIN SCEPTICAL WHETHER UDF CAN UNIFY OPPOSITION AND EFFECTIVELY CONFRONT PPP. ONLY ELEMENT HOLDING FRONT TOGETHER IS NEGATIVE ONE OF OPPOSITION TO BHUTTO; THERE ARE FEW, IF ANY, POSITIVE ONES TO UNITE THESE STRANGE AND INCOMPATIBLE BEDFELLOWS. RESULTS OF COUNCIL MEETING ONLY CONFIRMED GENERAL VIEW THAT UDF HAS LITTLE TO OFFER ELECTORATE. PRIMIN BHUTTO MOCKED OPPOSITION AT A RECENT LAHORE PRESS CONFERENCE, "CHALLENGING" THEM TO UNIFY SO HE COULD BEAT THEM AT THEIR BEST. WE DOUBT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO OBLIGE HIM.
GIBNEY

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